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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, April 1, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "RELIEF IN SIGHT FOR SHOPPING MOTHERS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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One day last week I was talking to Ruth, a good friend of mine. At the time Ruth was trying to think of something to send her curly-haired little niece for a birthday present. So I tried to be helpful. I suggested a pretty dress. Most all the little girls I know like to get pretty new dresses.

But Ruth didn't take very kindly to my suggestion. In fact, she had some definite reasons for not sending a dress or any other article of clothing to her niece. She had tried that before. And about two times out of three she found her gift coming back a week or so later to be exchanged.

Either the dress would be too small -- or it would be large -- or long in the skirt. And if it happened to be allright every other way, probably the shoulders were narrow or the dress skimpy about the waist. And she never knew whether to get six-year-old Betty a dress with a size to match her age or one marked for an eight or a ten-year-old.

So Ruth decided to evade the issue altogether. Now she send story books-- or dolls -- or toys -- anything that doesn't have to fit.

Well, that's Ruth's way out. But it certainly doesn't get at the root of the trouble. So today I'm bringing you the latest news of another solution to this problem -- one that should eventually make it easier to get clothes to fit American children.

At the bottom of all this confusion in sizes of children's clothing is this -- no one knows the measurements of representative American boys and girls-- the measurements needed to size garment patterns. For nobody has ever gone out and actually taken exact body measurements on a large number of children with a view to working out standard pattern sizes.

That is, no one ever had -- until last year. Then it was that the Bureau of Home Economics organized a big child-measurement study. Colleges and other institutions in eight States offered to cooperate. Now -- a year later -- the study is well underway. Over 44,000 boys and girls have already been measured. And before the study is finished there will be figures for probably twice that many children.

These 44,000 boys and girls are from States in different regions of the country. In the South -- measurements are being taken from Alabama and Texas children. In the North -- from Minnesota. In the Far West -- from California. In the Midwest -- from Kansas and Iowa. And in the East -- from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

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This makes the children fairly representative geographically. But they are equally representative in other ways. This 44,000 includes boys and girls of eleven different ages -- from 4 to 14. They are from well-to-do families and from families not so well off economically. They even represent different racial strains. In all these ways they are a real cross section of American childhood.

Before the measuring began last year, the leaders in this study had a conference with the manufacturers of children's clothing. They asked these manufacturers just what measurements would be most helpful to them in the sizing of patterns. And from this conference they decided upon 36 measurements for each child. Each one of these measurements is necessary in designing some kind of a child's garment.

The men and women who are doing the measuring in this study are specially trained for their jobs by anthropometrists (an' thro pom' e trists). Anthropometrist is just the short, hard way of referring to someone who is trained in the science of measuring the human body.

These measurers find that it takes about fifteen minutes to measure each youngster -- more of course for very young children. Fifteen minutes isn't long enough for the child to get tired. For he doesn't have to stand stiffly at attention or take uncomfortable positions during the measuring.

These measurements are to help manufacturers design comfortable, well-fitting clothing that children can romp and play in. Therefore they are taken when children are in natural positions. For instance, one measurement is taken as Johnny stands with his arm akimbo -- certainly a common post. This will be useful in making sleeves that fit when Johnny bends his arm.

Another measurement is taken from the waist to the back of the knee as Johnny bends forward. This will help in getting clothes that will "give enough" when youngsters lean over in their natural play -- to catch a low fly in baseball for instance.

These are but two of the measurements taken on each child. Another one finds the angle of the shoulder slope. That will help manufacturers get clothes that "hang" right. Others measure height -- chest girth -- hip breadth -- shoulder length -- and so on up to thirty-six different kinds of measurements for each boy and girl.

When all these figures are gathered they will go to statisticians who will figure from them some new basis for children's pattern sizes and ready-to-wear garments. And these, in turn, will go to the manufacturers or to anyone else who can use them to get better fitting clothing for children.

So, as the weather forecaster would say, "there is some relief in sight" for mothers who are weary of shopping by guess for ready-made children's clothing.
